



# In Touch

## Tarayana Newsletter

Vol 5 Issue 1- March 2013

Service from the heart

### From the Editor

A country guided by the four pillars of Gross National Happiness often encounters people with questions as to what extent are we being guided and what drives our development? It is often perceived that only the government keeps in mind the GNH philosophy when, in fact, it inspires many non-governmental organizations as well.

When Tarayana Foundation was first conceived, the Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck gave us the gift of his vision of a developing Bhutan that exemplifies the most essential 'happiness'. All the projects that we have carried out in our ten years of service to disadvantaged communities have been in keeping with the four pillars of GNH. These pillars are good governance, sustainable socio-economic development, cultural preservation and environmental conservation.

Our work takes place at the grassroots level and is more about teaching our rural communities to fish rather than giving them fish. We impart transferable skills to ensure that our community members become self-reliant and also contribute to the health of our country's economy. We do not stop with teaching skills but make sure community members accrue experience by giving them access to the workplace and to the markets for their products. Tarayana Foundation promotes not short-term socio-economic development, but "*Sustainable Socio-Economic Development*".

In this issue, you will find stories on how we have brought positive change to the people of some of our rural communities. Our Field Officer, Namgay, shares his six years of experience with the people of Doya for the first time. His story reveals the close affiliation between Tarayana's field officers and the people of the community with whom they live and work.

We hope our readers find this issue a reading pleasure!

## *A little push, a little encouragement, is Tarayana's way!*

Metsem Zangmo is a 32-year-old woman from Mikuri village, Pemagatshel. She never got the chance to study, because her parents needed her at home to help with the farming and other chores. She told us that her fellow villagers collected wild potatoes for consumption and did not engage in much agriculture. They cultivated very few vegetables, always the same crops every year.

Before Tarayana's intervention, their houses were constructed of cane and bamboo with banana leaves for the roof. The houses were not safe and did not protect them from the elements. "Now with the little money we earn from agricultural produce, we can renovate our homes and make them safe." Metsem Zangmo said. She said that they had to walk three to four hours from the main road to reach their village.

After implementing Tarayana's housing, nutrition, sanitation and various income-generating projects, she said that the people of Mikuri have benefitted greatly. She feels the people are motivated and they have changed their minds. She sees the people working hard, cultivating many different types of vegetables. Tarayana Foundation provides the rural communities with agricultural tools and seeds. Field officers teach the community members natural methods of farming. At Mikuri, every household now cultivates a kitchen garden of their own. This development has not brought about an immense improvement in the villagers' standard of living. Metsem Zangmo now earns at least Nu.500 a day.

Cheten Zangmo is 22 and she is also from Mikuri. She has joined the Tarayana Vegetable self-group in Mikuri and now earns Nu.150-200 a day from sales of her crops. She is proud to claim that she buys all the household necessities with her pay. Previously she never had a savings account with the bank of her own. All the money she earned, she spent. She was unable to prepare for her future financial needs.

Tarayana Foundation facilitates a Micro Finance program where the Foundation makes small loans to villagers and also teaches them the importance of savings and investment. When implemented, this program helps villagers experience the benefits of having a savings account. Cheten Zangmo now keeps a few hens and earns around Nu.200-500 per month by selling the eggs. She saves a few hundred and deposits this sum in the bank every month. Through her participation in a vegetable self-help group and her chicken coop, Cheten Zangmo is now on her way to saving for her economic future.



**Happiness is...**

*"...complete sense of satisfaction"*

Namgay  
Field Officer  
Samtse

*“A Complete Sense of Satisfaction”*



The first time I came to Lotokuchu in 2005, I was judgmental about the people here. I had this preconceived notion about them being mean, reserved and ‘orthodox’. For their part, the villagers seemed rigid and stone cold towards me. Culturally, they are a tribe called the Lhop who live in the Amo Chhu valley of southwestern Bhutan. They practice the ancient Bon religion and speak their own distinct Lhop dialect. We couldn’t communicate and I felt alienated.

The most difficult challenge I faced was learning their language and adapting to their culture. I began by asking each community member “what is your name?” and listening carefully to their replies. It took me two years to learn to speak Lhop with 80% fluency, and to understand almost everything they say.

But language wasn’t my only challenge. At that time, they lived two days walk from Samtse, the nearest town with road access. I had to cross the Damdung River 21 times to reach the village, and in monsoon season, the slippery log bridges threatened to dump me into the raging waters. Alone in the forest, I encountered pythons, green snakes and wild pigs.

Once I reached the village, I sometimes had to survive on 2 potatoes a day, hungry and cold, living in a work shed, cooking for myself at night in a mat hut kitchen. I missed my wife and children, who lived in Samtse. But I saw the villagers living in small rough shacks with bad roofs; one family consisted of a father, mother and 10 children, overcrowded with practically no floor space on which to sleep. I wanted to start by helping them build new homes, but first I needed to gain their trust.

For four years, I looked after their beloved elder Angay Shara, the oldest and most respected woman in the community.

She had daughters but no son. Tarayana provided some modest funds for me to purchase food and supplies for her each month. When she passed away, I participated in her death ritual as if I were her son.

The villagers were proud of me and saw that I accepted them and their customs—just as they accepted me.

Now that we had this bond, I was able to help them learn new construction methods and together we built homes for all the households in the community. My work also included empowering rural women (Helvetas funded), advancing opportunities for girls and women in the rural communities under the ADB fund, and rainwater harvesting.

At first some husbands opposed the formation of self-groups for the women, out of jealousy or fear. I invited the husbands and wives to attend a meeting, where I explained the potential benefits. In ancient times, they wove their own clothes from cotton, but they lost the art. I offered them instruction in traditional weaving, basket making, paper-making, and pickles. I was especially happy to see them rediscover their own traditional forms of weaving.

We managed to form 23 self-help groups where the women play an important role in making handicrafts and food products, and in generating income for their families.

We are a family now. The people may have seemed rigid at first but they are naïve and some of the most lovable people I have ever met. The times I spent with them are the most memorable and it saddens me to think of ever leaving this place. We would make plans to go for fishing, picnic and play sports.

There was one time when we made a five-day trip to Charlang, Amo Chhu for camping. They fished and I cooked. We stayed up late near the fire and they would have the most amazing stories to tell which always kept me fascinated.

I also utilized camping trips as an opportunity to educate them about the risks of alcohol, using a Nepalese film I purchased that they were able to understand. Subsequently, many of the villagers no longer consumed much ara or gave ara to their children; many stopped making ara entirely.

It is really amazing to see that Lotokuchu is developing so much. Now that there is access to farm roads and modern amenities, I see development proceeding at a fast pace. The ‘Doyaps’ are no longer scared to take risks. With the number of projects implemented, they make use of what they have gained. The people here have started to make small construction contracts and work as day laborers; they do not shy away from the opportunity to earn income anymore.

With change comes the inevitable threat to culture and tradition. I will dare not say that their culture and traditions have disappeared but it is a fear shared by me and the village elders as well.

They tell me that some of the changes are good, like how the drinking habits of the people including the children have stopped, but some are bad and permanent.

They feel that some traditions should be carried on in order for future generations to know their roots and for the world to learn and understand their culture.

My days at Lotokuchu are coming to an end as the day that I leave for the Green Technologies exchange program in Bangladesh is fast approaching. I reassured them that another good Field Officer from Tarayana will take my place but when I return to Bhutan, I am not sure whether I will be placed back here or somewhere else. I will be gone for a year and it will really seem like ages apart from my family.

What saddens me the most is when they tell me not to go and how much they will miss me. And yet, the best part of my job with Tarayana Foundation is when my project is completed successfully. It gives me a complete sense of satisfaction when I think that I have played a part in improving people’s lives...in uplifting them physically, mentally, and socially.



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## The "Cho"s - Cho Thinley and Cho Lham



Cho Lham Doya and Cho Thinley Doya are not just people with similar names but two persons who were brought together for a reason. Both of them are from Samtse Lotokuchu, Cho Lham from Lotokuchu Jigme and Cho Thinley from Lotokuchu Singye.

Cho Lham was one of the first female potters to have been trained in pottery when Tarayana sent the first batch for this training to Delhi in 2004. Cho Thinley was traveled to Delhi for this training.

Cho Lham was just 20 years old when she first left her village for India. It was strange for her not only to be in a country where she knew no one but also a place so huge with so many cars and people. She always worried she'd get lost and never find her way back. She tried to stick with the group and not wander off.

Her group included Cho Thinley, and he became her close companion because they were both from Lotokuchu. He took very good care of her. They knew each other before but it was being far from home that brought them together. A year later, they married and had two children.

They returned to Lotokuchu, but found that their love and new skills were not enough to keep their growing family safe and well-fed. They thought they could earn a living by making pots but that failed miserably because the local soil was not right for pottery. They continually faced difficulties and it was hard even to get by with one meal a day.

They did not even have enough money to buy a kilo of rice, although they worked hard on the farm. They took out a loan and found themselves burdened with debt from local lenders. The local lenders charged them an interest rate of three percent per month, which added up to a whopping 36% per annum!



Cho Thinley was glad that the need for a childcare center came up in Lotokuchu because his wife got a chance to be trained and earn money from it. She is presently working as the Buzip caregiver for the center that has been established in Lotokuchu Jigme.

Cho Lham also took out a small loan in an amount of Nu. 10,000 from Tarayana's Micro Credit programme as a contribution to help her husband buy what has become their main income generator, Bolero 'Lhop Community Express'.

He now operates a busy taxi service to pick and deliver goods and transport community members to and from the three villages of

Lotokuchu. With him working for the Paper Group and driving his Bolero, things all seem to complement each other's job brilliantly and to fall into place. Together they now earn enough to feed and support their family.

This experience of borrowing money has led the two "Cho's" to become lenders themselves. They do not charge any interest for the money lent because they understand and have gone through the difficulty in repaying the amount. They just want to help their fellow villagers to find productive ways to generate income for their families.



### In Brief

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#### Solar Water Heater Installation

Tarayana provided hands-on training on installation and maintenance of solar water heater to the nuns of Kingarabten and Pemacholing nunnery in Trongsa and Bumthang Dzongkhag respectively. It was noted that the solar water heater installed in these nunneries would help ease their work and reduce the use of firewood to heat water eventually contributing towards protecting the forest. This program is supported by the Joint Support Program "Capacity Development for Mainstreaming Environment, Climate change and poverty concerns in Policies, Plans and Programs".



#### Buzip Care Givers' Training

The three month long training for the Buzip Caregivers has been completed. All the 20 trained Facilitators were attached with the different daycare centres in Thimphu for the last month to gain practical experience before taking up their job in their respective Buzip Centres in the different rural communities. They will go on to look after rural toddlers at the various Buzip Centres.

While the toddlers and pre-schoolers spend some time with the facilitators, their mothers will get some time to learn new skills, upgrade their knowledge; engage in craft work or the local governance.



#### Results Based Management Training

A week long (7-11th Jan, 2013) Results Based Management training for the Program and Field Officers was successfully conducted at the Tarayana Centre with TA from the College of Natural Resources. The various topics covered included: project formulation, log frame preparation, implementation steps, monitoring and impact reporting. The intensive training also covered several relevant rapid assessment tools, statistical protocols including questionnaire preparation, data collection and basic analysis.



#### Microfinance Models & Operations and Financial Literacy

A skill up gradation for the Tarayana Staff was carried out with training in Micro-finance conducted by TA from BASIX organized by BDBL from 14th -17th January, 2013. Group work and exercises coupled with theoretical lectures ensured that the four day training programme was comprehensive and relevant. Tarayana undertakes several micro-finance related initiatives as a result of popular demand from the rural communities.

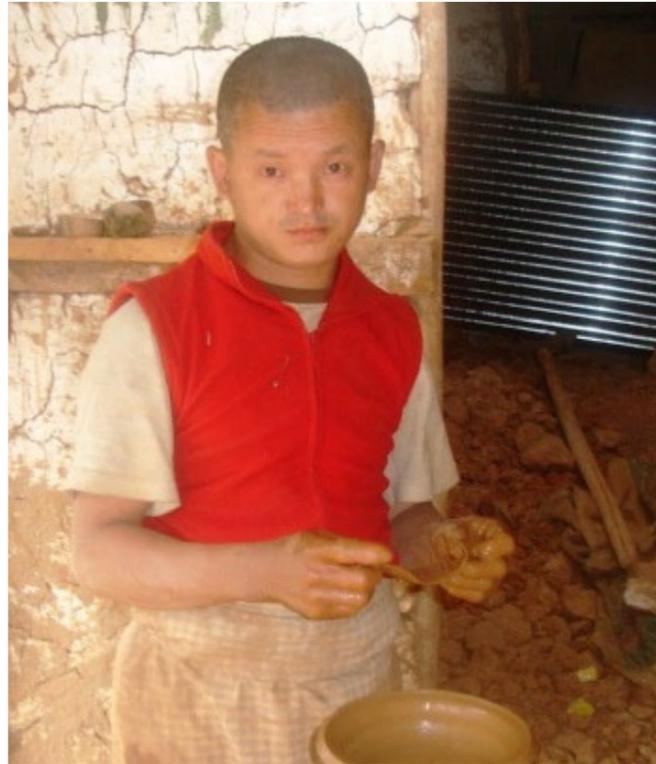


## Potters in Tongthophey

An earthen pot made from clay was a very popular cooking vessel in the olden days in Bhutan but with the changing times and the advent of modern kitchen facilities, the art of pottery had nearly vanished. In order to bring back the art of pottery and to preserve and promote this traditional art, Tarayana trained some Monpa community members, who are believed to be the original people of Bhutan living the heart of Black Mountain.

Two master potters trained in Thimphu at Kawajangsa for one year and then traveled to India for further training. After their return to the village, they trained other members in traditional pot making.

Tarayana also supplied electric potting wheels to enable the trained community members to produce more earthen pots and earn more income. Currently, there are five potters actively working at the Tongtongphey pottery centre in Trongsa. City dwellers with modern stoves have discovered that traditional Bhutanese dishes taste more delicious when cooked in earthen pots, so our potters have found an excellent market for their pots at the Tarayana Fair and Tarayana Rural Craft outlets in Thimphu and Paro.



### Mr. Karma Dorji

This 35-year-old from Wangling was trained in traditional pot making by Tarayana in 2003 at Kawajangsa for a year and then he was also further trained in Indian pottery in Dehli, India. After one year of training he came back to his home town and continued making pots but there was not much demand for earthen pots at that time. However, he was able to earn some money when there were exhibitions and events in Trongsa and Thimphu.

Mr. Karma shares about how his life has changed as a potter since then.

*"I was a cowboy before I took up pottery as a profession. Working as a potter was not my choice of work initially. It just happened that when someone from Tarayana came to our village for a consultative meeting about pottery making, my elder brother gave my name as an interested candidate. I was not even aware about pottery training. My brother asked me to go to Thimphu mentioning that there was a job opportunity which would pay me Nu 6000/- per month. At that time, what mattered to me was the money that I was going to make and I cared little about the kind of job I would doing.*

*I reached Thimphu and stayed at Kawajangsa for pottery training for a year. The training was not easy for me and I found it to be very challenging initially. However I gave it my best effort and was able to get through the training, which turned out to be the most interesting and memorable moments of my life. Today I am grateful to my brother for giving my name during that consultative meeting. This has been the best decision I made and I am glad that pottery-making is my profession.*

*I can make 10-12 pots a day and earn very good money from it. With the earnings, I send my children to school and support my family. I am also planning to build a house, although I will have to work even harder to pay for it. I feel this dream of mine will be possible because people have realized the significance of earthen pots and there is a demand for earthen pots in the market."*

### Phurpa Dorji

A 21-year-old from Wangling, Phurpa used to plow the fields and do farm work for a living. He says: *"Whenever I saw my friend Karma Dorji making pots, I always used to wonder whether it would be possible for me to join the group with him. But I never had courage to share my thoughts and ask anyone about this.*

*Fortunately my day came and here I am, making pots. I underwent training in traditional pottery, which I took very seriously and at which worked really hard. I love my work. I started planning my future: to get married and have children. As of now, I earn enough and can stand on my own. For me the most interesting part of this work is the firing of the earthen pots. We have to fire our pots for 10-12 hours and during that time we stay up very late at night and have a great time enjoying some drinks and cooking a special dinner, so it becomes a special get-together for us".*



### Tashi Lhamo

A 21-year old woman, from Wangling, Tashi studied until class three in Jangbi Community Primary School and later joined the Kingarabten nunnery school. However, she had to leave the nunnery in 2010 due to her family's requirement for her help with the farm work.

*"I heard about training for pottery making and weaving being facilitated by Tarayana Foundation at Tongtongphey. I rushed to gain that opportunity and was fortunate to be chosen. In the beginning, I thought of leaving program because it was really tough for me, but I am happy I stood strong and stuck with the training. I am proud to say that now I can make six to seven pots a day.*

*Nothing is impossible, I realize now! Before I thought pottery work was only meant for men but it's not. It is an enjoyable art that anyone can do. I have been encouraging my friends and relatives to try it out. Our Monpa Pottery Group earns about 70,000 - 80,000 a month, even if we produce only 7-8 pots in a day individually and that is a significant sum for us.*

*With the earnings I have saved, I am now planning to start a small business along with pottery making. If not, I will be the marketing officer for the pottery group. I love to work in this group. We enjoy our work a lot!!"*

### Pema Tshering



*"I might have ended up a cowboy like my uncle for the rest of my life if my village members had not nominated me for the training. They selected me for pottery training and I am fortunate enough to have gotten this opportunity.*

*In Thimphu, I learnt pottery making and mud printing while studying at Kawajangsa for three years. I came home after the training and continued my work but I could not do as much as my friend Karma did as there were many things going on at home. But now I have made up my mind to focus on my pottery work as much as I possibly can.*

*I have two children and I wish to see my children as Dashos (high class officials) in the future. I have to work hard so that I can send my children to school and help them to make something of their lives. And for myself, I have always had a dream of going to Japan to learn the art of Japanese ceramics."*



### Ugyen Dema (age 22, Wangling)

*"Tarayana provided me with many opportunities. They sent me to India for 6 months to train in solar engineering. There I learned how to install and maintain solar panels and solar lighting. Coming from a remote village and uneducated, I knew nothing until Tarayana initiated a project in our village. Tarayana has opened my eyes to the world. I am the only daughter in my family and my family supports me in whatever I choose to do.*

*I took up pottery making because we can make our living from it much more easily than from farm work. As a potter, I just need to be creative, careful and hard-working.*

*I feel I am fortunate because in our Monpa society, not many women and girls are lucky enough to get these kinds of opportunities due to family restrictions. I will endeavor to work hard to preserve and promote the traditional art of Bhutanese pot making."*

## Dechen-pelri for Greener Blocks



Tarayana Foundation engaged with Dechen-pelri community in implementing the project 'Piloting Green Technologies for Social-Enterprise' funded by the Canadian government in 2011.

Since then, these community members have been making Stabilized Compressed Earth Blocks (SCEB), decorative tiles, interlocking tiles, hollow-blocks and solid blocks. A batch of 15 community members was trained as the master-trainers.

They learned to examine the soil through the means of visual identification, shine, cohesion, composition and chemical composition for making eco-friendly, cost-effective and income generating construction materials. These members continue to further train other community members.

These locally made construction materials fuel the need for substantial and weatherproof housing. Tshewang Dorji, 18, also used the Stabilized Compressed Earth Blocks to build two toilets for his family. They no longer have to use toilets with wooden frames covered in plastic. He says he is glad to learn and operate green technologies than having his summer breaks wasted doing nothing in particular. Like Tshewang, many youngsters were enthusiastic and actively participating in the process.

Dema Tshomo and Kinzang Tshomo, both 17, whose families, after the resettlement, had a hard time adjusting their expenses with limited income. They both had to drop-out of their schools after the 10<sup>th</sup> standard because of financial reasons. Both of them say they enjoy working together with the community and hope that their little efforts would enhance the living conditions of their village. They feel that getting trained at a new skill which is "presented at their doorsteps" will help them yield some income and perhaps, enable them to go to school again.

Kencho Wangmo, 37, one of the first community members to join the project, feels that the blocks they make are eco-friendly, cost-effective and easy to transport since they are made right in the village by the villagers. She wants to set an example that women can also operate all the SCEB machines as easily as the men could. She aspires that the green technology she is using now will make the future of children in her village very bright. Kencho, who also happens to be the finance officer of the community centre, was very proud to announce that they got two orders for the Hollow Blocks worth Nu.20,000/- each.

The community centre at Dechen-pelri which faintly looks like an Eames house at nightfall has become a source of interest, income, ideas and learning for the community leaders as well as children alike. The people of Dechen-pelri exemplify that they can generate income while reducing carbon footprint as Bhutan continues to develop.



### Upcoming Events

April, May & June, 2013

April - 15th - 22nd Tarayana Annual Surgical Camp.

Debriefing of FK EXchange participants in Bangkok.

Prep-course for the next participants of Promotion of Appropriate Green Technologies to bring about rural prosperity.

May - 3rd, 4th & 5th Tarayana Annual Fair.

Tarayana male staff visit to 'Beyond Organic' in Indore.

June - Project Evaluation and Reporting.

### Support Tarayana

We invite you to be a part of reaching out to the most vulnerable members of our society through your support to Tarayana. We operate with financial support of individuals and organizations, without which we would not have the opportunity of helping so many families help themselves. Tarayana complements and supplements the initiatives of the Government in empowering rural communities towards sustainable livelihoods.

The Foundation maintains its accounts in accordance with accepted financial norms and is audited annually by the Royal Audit Authority of Bhutan. An audited financial report and an annual progress report are published every year and is available for all interested individuals and organizations.

Please contact us for more information.

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